

## LESSON 1E—NARRATIVE: WHO IS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST?

*Dr. Thomas A. Foor is an archaeologist.*

**D**r. Thomas A. Foor, Missoula, is an archaeologist. Tom has been involved in archaeological fieldwork since 1970, and he even teaches archaeology. He says, "Archaeology is all about *the thrill of discovery*."

Tom has always read books about explorers and adventurers and has been interested in how humans became as we are today. Human diversity—how and why humans organize into groups—presents many questions for him. Some of the questions he asks are: Why aren't we all members of just one society? Why do we even live in groups? Why isn't there just one kind of society? Why isn't there just one way of making a living?

He searches for answers to his questions through the "time machine" of archaeology. Like the explorers he's read about who searched for people in new places, Tom explores people from historic and prehistoric times, using archaeology to transport him to the past. Archaeology allows him to look at how, why, and under what conditions new human societies or communities formed. He uses the artifacts, features, and ecofacts that people left behind to study their lives and answer his questions.

Tom loves both historic and prehistoric archaeology. The most numerous sites in Montana are historic and late prehistoric. The cultures studied at most prehistoric Montana sites show a well-developed record of family-based societies. These

sites are important to address specific concerns of how the human world works. When sites are well preserved and left undisturbed, they are valuable—and fun—to study. Early sites may represent ways of life for which we have no modern comparisons, ways of life that are now extinct! Tom hopes to find a complete and intact living floor from a prehistoric campsite. It would help him identify different groups who may have lived within the site.

Tom was born in Washington, D.C., and attended elementary and secondary schools in Montana and California. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Montana. He obtained his doctorate from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and completed postdoctoral studies at the University of Michigan. In the past, Tom worked as the Montana State Archaeologist for the Montana Historical Society, Helena. Today, he is a professor of Anthropology at the University of Montana, where he guides archaeological students to do their best in searching for answers to the questions archaeologists ask.

Many instructors inspired Tom throughout his schooling. Dee C. Taylor, University of Montana, taught him the importance of being able to tell others about the excitement of archaeology. Albert C. Spaulding, University of California, Santa Barbara, taught him the significance of clear, logical, goal-oriented thinking, and concise communication. William

Duncan Strong, Columbia University, instructed him in the value of being a good writer. Clyde Coombs, University of Michigan, taught Tom the importance of using concepts that are measurable.

Tom's archaeological career began with work in the coal lands of southeastern Montana and north-central Wyoming. He found and excavated campsites, rock art sites, quarry sites, and bison kill sites. He has worked in locations near Great Falls and in western Montana. He has performed surveys and test excavations in Washington and Idaho, usually as part of cultural resource management projects. Tom has surveyed and excavated several California coastal sites, finding and investigating several large villages and shell middens. Middens are ancient garbage sites.

Tom has also worked in Western Europe, where he unearthed his most exciting find. When he was a student worker in France, he excavated a small statuette. Only about sixty-five statuettes of the kind he found have been discovered in Europe, from the east to the west. They all date from about the same time, the Upper Paleolithic period. Nobody really knows what they were used for, but they have many characteristics in common. If nothing else, these statuettes suggest that people all over Europe shared symbolic meanings long ago. Tom would love to find another!

Tom says that the best and most significant site is always the one he's currently working on. Tom is continuing seventeen years of work in

southwestern Montana's Centennial Valley, at the Tree Frog site. Tree Frog is a campsite with radiocarbon dates suggesting people lived there sometime in the past 300 years. Artifacts discovered at Tree Frog include pieces of a very distinctive type of pottery, arrow points made of volcanic glass (mostly from central Idaho), and historical trade goods like metal tools and a glass trade bead. The site is significant because it was occupied by people who were undergoing changes in how they defined their social identity. If those changes can be understood and interpreted, archaeologists are closer to answering their questions about human diversity.

As he studies the past, Tom is most intrigued with how Montanans were in indirect contact, or maybe direct contact, with members of other societies who lived all over North America. He is also amazed at the ingenuity shown by early Montanans in their use of the American bison.

Since archaeology is all about studying past human behavior, archaeologists must look for patterns. They then compare patterns of behavior that happened repeatedly and that resulted from similar conditions. They eliminate behavior that appears to have occurred randomly. Tom believes that the digital computer provides many remarkable and measurable tools to help recognize these patterns. He thinks these tools hold great promise for understanding people of the past.

It is very easy for Tom to get excited about archaeology. He loves his work. The toughest part of his work is giving low grades to students

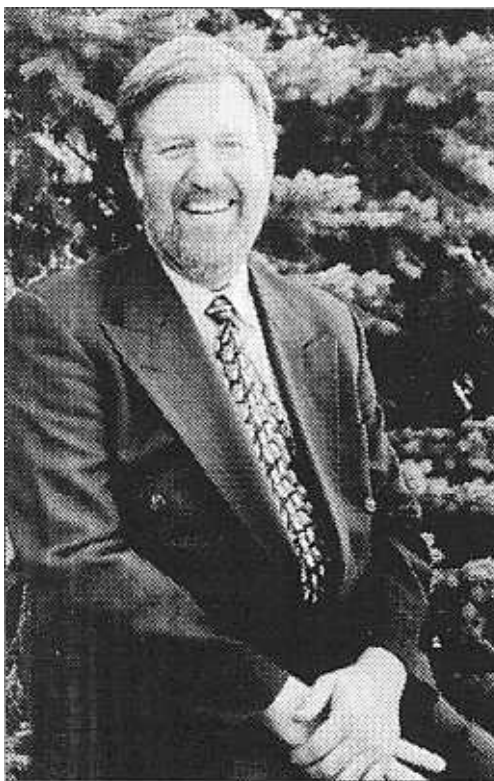
who do not do very well. He suggests that you study human behavior if you are interested in archaeology. A great archaeologist must have insights into people and how they behave. Also, since archaeological data usually comes from the ground, study dirt. Sedimentology, the knowledge of how dirt accumulates and erodes, and soil sciences, which study what happens to dirt after it accumulates, are both basic requirements for an archaeologist. After you gain expertise in these areas, you can specialize in other areas including botany, zoology, ecology, chemistry, physics, art history, or geology. Broad knowledge in many areas creates the best archaeologists.

When asked what he believes the future holds for archaeology, Tom responds: "If we want to continue doing archaeology, we need to convince the public that our work is worthwhile. We must ask questions the public wants answered. Since tax dollars pay for most archaeology, we have to investigate sites most likely to provide answers to those questions. We have to spend our valuable money and time researching sites where we can accurately reconstruct events. I think the future is limitless for young, technically proficient archaeology students who are excited about people and human behavior!"

When he's not involved with an archaeological project, Tom's hobbies

are traveling, playing golf, fishing, hiking, and swimming. He is also an amateur radio collector. His family members are his father, a surgeon, and his mother, who works in public relations. His brother works in law enforcement, and his sister is a nurse. If you are interested in archaeology, you can contact Tom at:

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